

TAPE-NO.

TAPE INDEX

NARRATOR Laura Meek  
Pringle

INTERVIEWER P. Lotz

PLACE Calzada Rd. Santa Ynez

DATE March 28, 1986

TRANSCRIPT  
PAGE NO. TAPE  
COUNTER

SUBJECT

NAMES

1	000	Introduction	
1	020	Grandfather	Thomas O'Hanlan
1	044	Children in family	
2	054	Laura born in 1898	
2	069	Coming to California - Oroville Orange Groves swindle	
3	115	Father	John Russell O'Hanlan
3	122	Coming to S.Y. Valley to teach and organize the high school	
3		Father Buckler	
3	152	Mrs. Cheney of U. of C., Berkeley accreditation of high school	
4	208	Living in Santa Ynez, 1910	
5	248	The town of Santa Ynez	
5	277	Sister and the News Press	
5	313	Locations of old high school and grammar	
6	373	Remembering classmates	
6	480	Mrs. Mattei End of Side 1, Tape 1	
7	000,	Begin Side 2, Tape 1 How Father got students to school	Gardners Crabbs Parker Knights
9	212	Leaving the area	
9	225	Not enough appreciation of Father's work	
10	254	Remembering the dances at Greer's Hall	
11	369	Leo Zeigler, Art Teacher	
11	392	Moving to Berkeley End of Side 2, Tape 1	
11	000	Begin Side 1, Tape 2 School in Berkeley	
12	053	First husband, Bert Meek	
12	096	Meek and Wilshire family history	
13	190	Meek's accomplishments in state	
13	244	Returning to S.Y. Valley in 1937	
14	286	Second husband, Emmett Edwards	
14	397	Ellen Taft Gleason End of Side 1, Tape 2	
15	000	Begin Side 2, Tape 2 Reminiscing Valley people	de la Cuesta Blance Crabb Mr. Shaw Cyril Lamb Howard Parks



Interview with Laura Meek Pringle  
Date of Interview: March 28, 1986, Calzada Ave., Santa Ynez  
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz  
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

Mrs. P: I am Irish on my father's side, the O'Hanlans and I'm Danish on my mother's side. The O'Hanlans were all intellectuals, true Irish, educated for generations in colleges and universities in Dublin and later on when they came to this country they were all Ivy League, Princeton and Yale.

My grandfather was Thomas O'Hanlan, he and his brother left Ireland when they were quite young. The author, O'Hanlan, who wrote, "Yes, Virginia there is a Santa Clause," was a cousin. They were Catholic and settled in New York. My older brother kept in touch with this Catholic side of our family. My branch went down to New Jersey and they became Methodists, both of those brothers from Ireland became Methodist ministers. Grandfather O'Hanlan also taught in Pennington, New Jersey, where we were all born on the campus which is just a stones throw from Princeton and we had a lovely life.

PL: How many children in your parents family?

Mrs. P: Five, two brothers and two sisters all older than I. The two boys were in college when my father decided to move his family to California. He uprooted my lovely mother, who was a very spoiled and sheltered person.



I was born in 1898 so I was three years old when we started for California. We came by train and at that time it was the Southern Route, The Sunset, I remember those seats, they were made of straw, tourist class. I remember there was a little burner at the end of the car where you could have something hot, fry an egg, or have coffee. So we came to California and my father bought an orange grove sight unseen. He had never seen an orange tree in his life, but he decided to make a living that way and support his family by growing oranges. We came to a lovely spot in Northern California named Palermo, named for the city in Italy, and had ten acres of....oh, I wish you could have seen them, oranges so big, ripening on the trees, but we had no way to market them! It was one of those land swindles! It was one of those famous land swindles in California in the early 1900's. The location was out of Oroville. This was before trucking and the Southern Pacific Railroad had cut this little town out of its route and just about killed those people who had bought land there. They had sold land with these beautiful groves to professional people like my father, all easterners and as I remember there were some lovely old Victorian homes there. We starved, just lived on oranges, and a few chickens. My Dad had all the chickens numbered, he was a mathematician. Mother used to tell how Father would go out and change one chicken to the right nest, the nest went with the numbered chicken. It must have been very

Butte Co.  
1887



funny. After going hungry for 2 years my father went back to teaching. My father's name was John Russell O'Hanlan. He dropped the O when he came to the Santa Ynez Valley, and he did that because he got tired to explaining why we were not Catholic. One of his best friends here in the Valley was Father Buckler. I think the only invitation out to dinner here in the valley for my father and mother was to the Mission with Fa. Buckler and Mame Goulet. At that time people here were very narrow minded, you could not touch a drop of liquor. I was never made to go to church but I would go to the Mission with my father. But I am ahead of my story... My father went to teaching in Oroville, and the superintendant at the University of Cal. at Berkeley heard of him in the educational world and she sent for him to come to Berkeley and it was then that we came down here. Father had done a neat bit of work in establishing the overhauling of the public school, it was badly needed at that time, so she sent my father here to the Santa Ynez Valley high school to make improvements in this school. The high school was not accredited so the graduates could not go on to college. Father had gotten the high school in Willows, CA. accredited so Mrs. Cheney then sent for him and asked him to go to the Santa Ynez Valley in 1916 to work at this high school. When graduates from high school wanted to go on to teaching school, all they had to do was pass an exam, no further education. This high school had typing, short hand, and



other classes but a great deal was needed here. This place was a very closed community, almost like the deep South, a feuding and a fighting, so here comes an Easterner and a graduate of Yale which didn't help very much and he brings in qualified teachers to boot. That meant that some teachers lost their jobs, they weren't qualified. My father brought in Latin, mathematics, foreign language, and science. He taught mathematics himself and he would teach all night if necessary. Bert Mattei wanted to be an engineer and my Dad was a born teacher, he helped Bert and all the Buells, they were as bright as they could be. They just needed to be taught. Father would teach anything the students wanted even if it was only one pupil.

Stimford

PL: Where did you live in Santa Ynez?

Mrs. P: One of the first things he did and it is amusing, did you know there is a tennis court down in a gully as you go into the park? The first thing my father did was build a tennis court. I think Dad and I were the only ones to play tennis then, and I was only 11 years old. Everyone else here played baseball. The high school was located at the head of Sugunto Street (west) and that school was very beautiful. It was like a Greek temple, U shaped and well planned and my Dad was thrilled with it, it was just being finished. We lived on the hill above it, we built our home there. It was located where you enter Santa Ynez, on



Cuesta Street. There was a marsh in front of it, by the Zanja de Cota Creek, and I just loved it. It had water crests<sup>s</sup> in it and to go to town I would hop from stone to stone and above that is the hill and our house is still there. Mrs. Muriel Edwards bought part of the acreage and we bought the middle section and Hugh Brun<sup>UZZUM</sup> who had the drug store had the third section. It was kind of nice to sit there and look out onto the road off to San Marcos Pass. We had very little in our lives then to entertain us except to look over the landscape. People thought we were superior but we didn't think that, we had to live somewhere. Maybe we would see a light off in the distance coming into town, then I would go into town to see who had driven in so my sister could put that bit of news in the newspaper. My sister put these events in the Santa Barbara News Press then owned by Reg Fernald. He thought my sister was kind of nice and she thought the same of him. She had to get ten articles a week in order to qualify and I was to find out who had come to town and it would go into the paper. My sister was so pretty but no intellectual, she collected hearts more or less but if she did not have ten articles she would fudge a little and make it up. One time she quoted someone and the man took exception to her quote and was angry but she didn't get sued. Later on Grace Lyons Davison wrote for the News Press as my sister did. Going through the town of Santa Ynez there is an old yellow framed house and that was



where the high school was held before the cement school was built. My father taught there until the new school was finished. I went to grammar school in a little house on the left side of the road. The old main high school had burned down in 1906.. Our home was ideal as it was close to the new high school.

PL: Do you remember any of your classmates?

Mrs. P: The Nossers of Nojoqui were classmates, Dorothy Nossers Brown. Kellogg was manager of the Coll<sup>e</sup>ge Hotel; and Katherine Kellogg was my friend. The Grays, Eleanor Gray was a friend, the Downs, the Davises, Adruflo Lopez, who later came back into my life in the 1930's, was a friend, Angelo Camargo, Tomas Ontiveros. There is a picture of Tomas hanging in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art the Matteis, Bert ~~was~~ so bright, Fred was married, Clarence was well on his way to being a fine artist, Charles was a good artist too. Charles was painting camouflage for the government and helping his mother in the tavern, and they didn't know he had artistic talent, a natural born artist.

PL: Did you know Mrs. Mattei at all?

Mrs. P: Very little, she worked hard, raised her children well, it was her husband, Felix who was very glamorous.

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1



PL: How did your father start the accreditation for the high school?

Mrs. P: It was through the University of California and the state. I don't know how he got the extra money because it was not part of my world. The motivation was through the university and the supertendant was a Mrs. Cheney, and my father was devoted to Mrs. Cheney through the years. My father was from the old school, a scholar, and alot of teachers would not have approved of him as he did not give marks; he was against A's, B's and C's. He felt if you failed that he had failed too. So he was a stern disciplinarian and he called all the students Miss or Mr.

? I remember the Campalias family from Los Alamos, she was my friend also. Father went all the way up there to get her to come to high school. I remember when they planted all those olive trees in Los Alamos, I was staying with the Campaliases.

PL: How did he qualify the high school?

Mrs. P: My father qualified the school by drawing in more students. We went in a horse and buggy that we borrowed from Mrs. C.D. Gardner as she liked my father. He and I would go out into the countryside when he would hear about another child ready for high school. The Campalias owned a ranch near Gaviota up on the mesa near the railroad tracks and one time the train was coming by when the horse bolted, my father told me to get down into the bottom of



the buggy and away we went. In due time my Dad got the horse under control and then we went on to the Campalias place. They had a large family, so Dad told the family that one daughter was now 14 and she should be coming to high school. That was the way he got his number of students, and I don't know what number he needed. Then he heard about the Tunnell family up out of Santa Maria, and he got them to come to school. In due time he had his number. Not only did he get them to come to school, he had to find board and room for them in town, as most of them lived on ranches far from town. Dad got Mrs. Gardner to take one or two, the Crabbs took one or two. Even the teachers had to find homes to live in. The Thompson children came. They left home Sunday nights stayed in town all week and went back home on Friday afternoons. It was not easy for my Dad to get the school started. But it was a state law that to qualify you had to have so many students and he accomplished that.

PL: You were very close to you father?

Mrs. P: I was the doting daughter type, the youngest, I found in later life that I as much like my father although I loved my mother very much. My mother was spoiled and pretty and talented. My idea was to be out on a horse riding all around. If we didn't own a horse I would borrow one. The Knights were another Santa Ynez family and I would go along with them to bring in the cows. The girls had names



like Flossie Mae, Ferny Ivy, Elsie Queen, Violet, and you had to say both names. I think the Edsell boy married one of the Knight twins.

I used to go into the College Hotel and sign the hotel registry and so did Odin Buell. Sam Bray was another boy from school.

I remember that Mrs. Parker was on the Board of Education for the school and it was necessary that Mrs. Parker liked you. My Dad picked out his first teachers but the Board had to pass on all of them because they paid their salary. The Buells and the Matteis could not have gone on the college without that accreditation and it would have been a totally different world for those boys if they had not been able to go to college.

PL: How long did you and your family stay here in Santa Ynez?

Mrs. P: We had come in 1910 and we left in 1915 and went back to Berkeley. My father did not want to leave here it was sort of heavenly but because of the atmosphere of being not quite accepted.

PL: Didn't the people recognize what he had accomplished here?

Mrs. P: I don't think so. In later years when I came back to live here I recall talking with people and hearing things that happened in the years that we had been here before, and John McGillvery <sup>was a McGillvery</sup> was not happy with Father. The McGillrerys were very prominent people in this valley with <sup>Los Olivos</sup>



lots of land. The Buells loved him and through the years we kept track of each other. In later years my two daughters and I came through here and stayed in Buellton, saw Evelyn and Walter (Buell) and went to a dance in Santa Ynez, that brought back memories of the days when we went to dances there. I remember Greer's Hall, they had a raised ~~area~~ area where they put on plays and that was where the fiddlers sat. One time we went to this dance, my mother and sisters and I with Maudie Fields, Mother was so lovely, so Eastern and elegant, and we sat on a little bench around the hall, everyone sat there except the boys who were off to one side, when this man stood up with his fiddle and started calling the square dance, "Take your partner, swing your partner."....and Mother said, "Who is that man!" My sisters and I froze because sitting next to her was Maudie Fields and it was her father. Maudie said, "That's Papa." Mother said, "Oh what a fine strong voice!" My sisters were Margarette who was 18 and Marie who was 16 and four years older than I. Maud Fields and Marie were classmates at high school. It was Margarette who wrote for the newspaper. Marie died very young at 37. My mother's people were Danish and were landed back in the old country. Her father was apprenticed to a sea captain and that was how he came to this country. Arne Madsen told me years later that he recognized my Danish forebearers. My mother had my grandfather as a teacher and that was how she met my father.



PL: So your father was disappointed to leave this Valley?

Mrs. P: Yes, he loved it here as it reminded him of the mountains of the Tyrols, he loved the mountains here. Did you know Mr. Leo Ziegler? He taught art at the high school some years ago. Mrs. Muriel Edwards got him a job here at the high school when she was Superintendant of Schools for Santa Barbara County, and she was my mother-in-law when I was married to Emmett Edwards. The Zieglers were Jewish and they had to leave Germany so they came here and loved this area as much as my father because of the mountains.

PL: Did your father teach in Berkeley?

Mrs. P: Yes, and we lived on Euclid Ave and right next to us were the Maybecks. My sister went to college at Berkeley and Marie and I went to private school. Father had to go where the job was and he then went up to Alpine so he was there while we were getting educated. Then he came to Hayward. By that time I was teaching Kindergarten in Oroville. My father had a fine reputation as a good teacher and on occasion people from the university would come to observe his classes.

It would be nice if his name was mentioned here in the Valley. The modern school you see now, he started.

End of Side 2, Tape 1

Begin Side 1, Tape 2

PL: After coming to Berkeley in 1915, where did you go to



school?

Mrs. P: To Miss Grace Barrett and I graduated as a Kindergarten teacher, but before that I was at Berkeley High school. Miss Barrett had the only private Kindergarten training school at that time. This school was on Ashby Ave. in Berkeley, a two year course. From there I went up to Oroville, Cal. and took one of the first Kindergarten classes they had. It was in September and my Dad took me up there and it was hot, but I fell in love with the location, all the orange and olive trees, it was a beautiful little mining town then. It was there that I met my first husband, Bert Meek. He was a young surveyor for the Western Pacific Railroad and a graduate of the University of Cal. Berkeley. He lived in Oroville and everyone loved him. He was a native Californian. His mother had been born in a covered wagon on the trail to Calif. They were Mormons who had split with the mother church in Salt Lake and were heading for San Bernardino. They settled in that area and her name was Wilshire, the Meeks were also in that same Mormon party. The Wilshires became very successful, they were engineers the first successful engineers to put in irrigation ditches. The Meek Ditch is still there. They started a new church called the Church of the Nazarine. Bert's memory of his mother was her taking baskets and baskets of food to the needy. When his mother died it was a terrible blow to Bert and he was left on his own. He became a very



successful man of many talents, horticulturist, beautiful horseman, polo player and State of California legislator. So here I am the Kindergarten teacher, I didn't keep records as to money or attendance, the principal put up with me and we made up our records, so we could get the money from the state. Then I began hearing about BB, BB was coming back to town, and I met him. We were married and lived there in Oroville. Later with our three children we moved to Sacramento. Before Bert and I were married he was with the state legislature, and was the force behind the passage of two important bills, one, the mosquitoes abatement bill and the other about prisons. The white line you see on every road in the state was another of Bert Meek's improvements.

PL: Tell me alittle about your children?

Mrs. P: Bert, the oldest lives in Santa Barbara, Louise lives in Mississippi, Ann now lives in Louisiana, Jackie lives in San Francisco and John lives in New Orleans. They were all very young when Bert died in 1937.

PL: Why did you return to the Santa Ynez Valley in the 30's?

Mrs. P: I came back here after settling Bert's affairs, it was a place I could call home. I had many debts after Bert died, and no home left in Atherton. I knew I could not live in the Bay Area again. So because I had kept contact with people here I brought my children here. Mrs.



Muriel Edwards and her son, Emmett welcomed us and I needed them. And thats when I rented the Janin house. Beside the children I had two Japanese girls helping me, and they were part of the family. Later those girls had to go to an internment camp after Pearl Harbor and that was terrible for me and for them.

PL: Was your second husband, Emmett Edwards married before?

Mrs. P: Yes, he had been married to Ann Dabney. The Dabneys had property here and a cabin in the back country. I was married to Emmett for 11 years. His mother and I were the best of friends, and as I told you, she was the Superintendent of County Schools.

PL: Did you know Ellen Gleason, who organized the Historical Society and Museum?

Mrs. P: Bud Taft (Ellen Taft Gleason) and I raised our children together, and we were very close in those early days after I came in the 30's. Our two daughters were of an age, Venetia and Ann. She was married at that time to Orrin Taft, and he was a stuffy person, from a prominent family back east. If the children were fighting in the back seat on the way to church, he would stop the car, and tell them all to get out and walk. After Orrin died I lost track of Ellen, later she married Bob Gleason and her daughter married Charles Gleason, his brother.



I never did ~~helped~~ with the organization ~~fo~~ the Historical Society, but I saw her socially. I was away when she died in 1969. End of Side 1, Tape 2

Begin Side 2, Tape 2

I knew the de la Cuestas of Buellton and Santa Ynez, one of the daughter's Dulce, went to school with my father. We went to many events in the adobe home, near Buellton. Anyone of note who came to the Valley were entertained there. One of the lovely sights I remember as a child was seeing Blanche Crabb riding horseback to church at the Mission with all her beaus riding along with her. The Crabbs had the first Cadillac in the Valley. Mr Shaw was a popular man, he owned the property now called Duff, south of the Mission, he operated a nursing home for new mothers there, he was an Englishman as was Cyril Lamb who owned Los Amoles, and later I bought 20 acres of that ranch and built a home. Howard Parks sold me that property.

At this point the tape reacorder malfunctioned and we had to stop the interview, but I am grateful to Mrs. Pringle for her time that day.

End of interview.